THE

NATURE AND THE CAUSES

OF

ATHEISM,

POINTED OUT

In a DISCOURSE, delivered at the CHAPEL in LEWIN'S-MEAD, BRISTOL.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

Remarks on a Work, entitled *Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle.*

Par Dupuis, Citoyen François.

By JOHN PRIOR ESTLIN.

Ποτερον τα ξυμπανλα, και τοδε το καλουμενον ολον, επιτροπευειν φωμεν την του αλογου και εικη δυναμιν, και τα οπη ετυχεν; η τανανλια καθαπερ οι προσθεν ημων ελεγον, ΝΟΥΝ, και ΦΡΟΝΗΣΙΝ τινα θαυμαζλην, συνταττουσαν διακυβερναν;

PTATON. PHILEB.

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1797.

For what is Freedom, but the unfetter'd use
Of all the Powers which God for use has given?
But chiefly this, with holiest habitude
Of constant Faith, him First, him Last to view
Thro' meaner powers and secondary things,
Effulgent as thro' clouds that veil his blaze.
But some there are, who deem themselves most free
When they within this gross and visible sphere
Chain down the winged thought, scoffing ascent,
Proud in their meanness: and themselves they cheat
With noisy emptiness of learned phrase,
Their subtle fluids, impacts, essences,
Self-working Tools, uncaus'd Effects, and all
Those blind Omniscients, those Almighty Slaves,
Creation dispossessing of its God.

COLERIDGE.

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TO THE REVEREND

ROCHEMONT BARBAULD,

THE

BELOVED COMPANION

OF HIS

YOUTHFUL STUDIES,

THE STEADY FRIEND OF HIS

RIPER YEARS,

THIS DISCOURSE,

IN TESTIMONY

OF HIGH RESPECT

FOR INTELLECTUAL EXCELLENCE,

OF ARDENT ESTEEM

FOR TRIED INTEGRITY,

AND OF CORDIAL AFFECTION

For every AMIABLE QUALITY of the HEART,

IS INSCRIBED,

BY

The AUTHOR.

BRISTOL, Feb. 16, 1797.

EPHESIANS, ii. 12, latter part.

—— WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.

THE design of the ensuing discourse renders it necessary to remind you, that the word in the original, by which the Ephesians are here characterized before their conversion to Christianity, is Αθεοι, Atheists. The apostle, in describing their former state, observes, that "they were" not only "without Christ," but destitute of the advantages of the Mosaic dispensation, "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and *Atheists* in the world."

Now, of what nature this Atheism was, and consequently who are the persons whom the apostle considers as Atheists, it is not difficult to conjecture, when we call to mind, that at Ephesus was the famous temple of the heathen goddess Diana, who was worshipped there with the greatest pomp and solemnity; and therefore those rites, which were observed in the heathen world in honour of false and imaginary deities, did not exempt those who practised them from the charge of Atheism. The apostle probably meant, that they had *no knowledge of the one true God*; they were in this sense *Atheists*. Or, as it is rather *defined* than *translated* in our version, they were "without God in the world."

Many different schemes of Atheism, according to the different principles on which men, who did not acknowledge the existence of an *intelligent cause* of all things, have attempted

attempted to account for the phænomena of nature, are given by writers on this subject, and particularly by Dr. Cudworth: with respect to all which it may be observed, that after a kind of reasoning which would only excite a smile of contempt, if applied to any other subject, they generally end in substituting an unmeaning word, such as *fate*, *necessity*, *chance*, or *nature*, in the room of a *powerful and active intelligent being*.

To constitute a man an Atheist, in the true sense of the word, in the sense in which the apostle uses it, it is not necessary that he should positively have embraced any particular scheme to account for the origin and preservation of the universe without the intervention of an intelligent cause, but only negatively, that he should not have admitted among his articles of belief, the existence of this cause. Some of the Ephesians had possibly adopted the system of Epicurus,

and supposed that the world was formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms; but it is probable that the generality had implicitly adopted the commonly received heathen mythology. The sense of the apostle therefore appears to be, that the Ephesians, before they were enlightened by the Gospel, were without the knowledge of the true God—had no conceptions of his nature and perfections—of the worship and obedience which he requires, or of the methods by which they were to obtain his favour; and that therefore, though they might believe in some invisible powers, and even pay them a species of religious homage and obedience; yet as this belief was founded in error, this worship in superstition, and this obedience in ignorance, they were in reality Atheists, or without God in the world.

There are two kinds of Atheism, *speculative* and *practical*, which require to be distinctly con-

considered. Although these are closely united, yet they are not exactly the same, as they may proceed from different causes, and as the one seems more immediately connected with the *understanding*, and the other with the *will*; the one seems to have its seat in the *head*, and the other in the *heart*. With respect to the former of these, *speculative* Atheism, it consists in denying the existence of an *intelligent* author of the universe. For in a dispute with an Atheist *as such*, we have nothing to do with the *other* attributes of the deity, but are only to demonstrate that he must exist, as possessed of *intelligence*. When this is once established, we are then led to the consideration of those *other perfections* of the divine Being, which with *intelligence or wisdom*, are equally the foundation of our religious confidence and veneration. I shall not take up your time, at present, in proving that there are *marks of design* in the frame and constitution of the visible

visible world. Is it possible to open our eyes—is it possible to contemplate, not only the general laws by which the universe, and every part of it is governed—to contemplate, not only a system, but a world—not only a world, but a single animal or vegetable—not only a single animal or vegetable, but even the *smallest part* of the *smallest* animal or vegetable, without being convinced of this? The belief of the existence of a Deity does not depend upon any deep, abstruse, or metaphysical modes of reasoning. If there be any first principles, to which the human mind necessarily recurs as the foundation of all its reasoning, and the ground of its belief on any subject, these establish the doctrine beyond the possibility of its being shaken. Every *act* implies an *agent*; every thing that *begins* to be, that is, every *effect*, implies a *cause*.—(I state the axiom thus, because some have improperly stated it, *whatever exists must have a cause*; which

which leads to disputes on the subject.) But I assert that every thing which *begins* to be, or every *effect*, must have a *cause*; every machine must have a contriver, every thing made a maker; every constitution a framer. These are axioms, which the human mind, in its natural state, necessarily must assent to, as soon as they are proposed to its consideration. If you were to hear the cavils of Atheists respecting them, you would not be able to restrain—what shall I say?—not, I hope, your hatred or resentment, but your pity for the confusion and intricacy of their ideas, on the most plain and intelligible of all subjects. One of the expedients which they have recourse to, (and of this the French writers have particularly availed themselves) is, to evade the subject altogether, and instead of accounting for a *part*, or for *one thing* which the mind *can* comprehend, immediately to call off its attention to the *universe*, or to what it can

not comprehend. They sometimes argue in such a manner (and they are necessarily driven to it) as a person would do, who should say that the house made the builder; sometimes, that the bricks, stones, and mortar made the house; at other times, that it made itself; and at other times, that the *operation* or *act of building* was the *builder*.

A great deal of confusion, on this subject, arises from not attending to the following circumstance. The reasoning in the works of nature, and in the works of art, is exactly the same. Let us, my brethren, affix clear ideas to the words we make use of. The works of art, mean the works of design, but then, it is *human* design. The works of nature, mean likewise the works of design, but then, that is of *divine* design. In other words, the works of *art* are the works of *man*; the works of *nature*, if we mean any thing by the word, are the works of *God*.

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Every object around us suggests *three* ideas to the mind;—an *effect*, *agency*, and an *agent*. They who deny the existence of the *agent*, must confound him, either with the *operation*, or with the *effect*; and yet they would not confound the *builder* of the house with the *act of building*, or the *house itself*; nor is it probable that they would say, that the *printer* or *binder*, the *printing* or *binding*, or the *book itself*, was the *author of the composition*. Though they would guard against *these* absurdities, because they would be immediately seen and felt by all; yet, my friends, they who deny *the existence of God*, assert much greater absurdities; for surely there is more of the effect of design in the *universe*, than in any *human composition*. It has been usual to speak of, *the works of art*; and some, by a bold figure, have addressed Art, as a *person*; and yet no one ever thought of

substituting *art* for *man*; although many, (and I fear it has been one great cause of atheism) have, with as little reason, substituted *nature* for *God*. The words *nature* and *art*, then being now clearly understood, it may be proper, for the benefit of those who have bewildered themselves with metaphysical speculations, to consider the true definition of a *cause*. A *cause*, then, in the philosophical sense of the word, as distinguished from a *power*, and as appropriated to a *work of design*, is that which *comprehends*—which *contrives* or *plans*—and which *executes*. Every *real cause*, I say, implies these *three* things: *comprehension*, *contrivance*, and *execution*. It is impossible that these can exist, but in an *intelligent* mind; and every thing *less* than these, which includes what are called *secondary* causes, is in reality *no cause at all*. The parent is not the *cause* of the child; much less is the egg the *cause* of the insect

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or the bird, the acorn of the oak, or the tree of the fruit. These can neither comprehend, nor plan; but are only *instruments* in the hand of God, to produce the effect; which, after all, is owing to his agency or operation. I mention not these, my friends, as all, or the principal arguments for the existence of a Deity. *Every* object in nature, every thing within us, and around us, is a demonstrative proof of this truth; and the strength and fulness of it, is in proportion to the variety of objects of contemplation, which there are in the vast universe; and let it be observed, that every, the minutest part of every being, is one of these objects of contemplation. So that every being, which is considered as a *whole*, or a *system*, contains as many distinct arguments; each of which "strikes like a sensation," as it consists of parts which are the distinct objects of observation. Even a child, by

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presenting a single flower, or even a leaf, may answer the arguments of the most conceited Atheist that ever existed. Such, my friends, is the foundation upon which is erected, that greatest, that most sublime, that most essential article of belief,—which diffuses a sacred light on every object, and fills the human mind with its noblest conceptions, and most elevated and elevating sensations—THE EXISTENCE OF A DEITY. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it; and man must cease to be a rational being, or to use his reason on this subject, if he does not acknowledge the existence, of AN INTELLIGENT AUTHOR OF THE UNIVERSE.

In this view of *speculative* atheism, its foundation, and the methods of confuting it, which I hope is level to every capacity, I am not conscious of having indulged myself in passionate declamation—lukewarm or indifferent

ferent, I do not pretend to be.—Parent of good! thou, who didst form the human heart, didst not form it so obdurate and unfeeling!—but I am willing to rest the whole on a fair appeal to those principles on which all our reasoning is founded.

But a much more difficult task now lies before me, in which my business is not, so much to *convince*, as to *persuade*.

The understanding is reason; it is the organ of mental sight; and when certain propositions are presented before it, when certain objects are placed in its view, if there be no derangement of intellect, if there be no imperfection in the organ; it must assent to them, it must see them. It is true, prejudice or vice may be so strong as to render the blindness of the mind incurable; but as this is a case to which no reasoning can apply, so it is a case, which we can only pity

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and deplore. We presume reason to be an attribute of human nature; and to reason, unbiassed by prejudice and passion, is our ultimate appeal.

But man is not a creature of *intellect only*; unless we consider intellect as including the powers of the *will*, as well as of the *understanding*. If he were a being of *pure intellect*, as some modern schemes of philosophy seem to suppose, he would indeed *see truth*, but he would not *act* at all. We must suppose a desire, either of *his own* happiness, which would make him a *selfish* being; a desire of the happiness of *others*, which would make him a *benevolent* being; or a desire of the misery of others, which would make him a *malevolent* being, or some *combination* of these principles, to constitute him a *moral* agent, or even an agent of *any description*. In giving you an account of *practical* atheism, which to all intents and

purposes

purposes,—which as far as *conduct* is concerned is the same with *speculative* atheism,—but certainly attended with greater moral depravity, as it implies that a man acts contrary to the conviction of his own understanding,—in giving you an account of *practical* atheism, it may be proper to enter more minutely, into the consideration of the frame and constitution of the human mind; in which it will appear, that a foundation is laid in it, not only for the belief of the *existence* of God, but for all those *practical regards* which are due to him, as that Being with whom we are most connected, and on whom we most intimately depend. Abstracted from all metaphysical arguments, particularly those which are called arguments *a priori*, or deduced from the consideration of necessary existence, it may be proved, by the same mode of reasoning by which we infer *intelligence* or *wisdom* in the author of nature, that he must possess *power*

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and *goodness*, (into which, with *wisdom*, *all perfection* may be resolved,) in a degree equal to that which the human mind endeavours to conceive, when it uses the term *infinite*.

Consider the laws of God, which come under our inspection, which, the more they are known, the more wise and benevolent they appear—consider the number of worlds, and systems of worlds, with all their various inhabitants, which we have been able to discover in that small portion of space with which we are acquainted, and say, if the *maker*, *preserver*, and *governor of them all*, must not be a Being whose power is almighty, whose wisdom is perfect, and whose goodness is infinite? View *this Being* as *your Father* and *your Friend*—as the author of all your faculties of enjoyment, and of all the objects which are adapted to their gratification—as that Being on whom you every moment depend,

depend—and must every moment depend, through that unknown, and interminable futurity which lies before you, and say what regards are due to him? Is it rational, is it possible, to live totally regardless of such a Being? It is possible, but oh! my brethren, it is not rational. By the constitution of our nature we are bound to the veneration and love of such a Being, and to make his will the rule of all our actions. In order to be deeply impressed with the conviction of this truth, let us attend, a little more particularly, to that constitution which he has given us. Besides the *external senses*, which are allowed to be inlets to all our sensations and ideas, there are some *finer powers of perception* in the human mind, of different degrees of strength, according to different circumstances internal and external, to which we are indebted for a principal part of the happiness of life; and which are the foundation of every thing, which is great, dignified

and excellent in characters and in conduct. These are called, by an excellent moral writer (Dr. Hutcheson,) *reflex* or *subsequent* senses; and there is a peculiar advantage in the appellation, as it renders them the distinct objects of our attention, and leads to that cultivation and improvement of them, which for want of this distinction, among other causes, has of late been too much neglected. To this class of perceptions belong the sense of *beauty*, of *sublimity*, of *novelty*, which are the sources of the pleasures of imagination; the sense of *honour* and of *shame*, of *decency* and of *propriety*; the sense of *sympathy*; the *moral* sense, and what comprehends every thing that is refined and excellent in them all—A SENSE OF RELIGION. By which I mean, not merely a *belief in the existence of God*, but an *internal relish* for the pleasures of devotion, and all those emotions of *gratitude*, *love*, *reverence*, and *resignation*, which are due to

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a Being of all possible perfection, who sustains the nearest relation to us, and upon whom we entirely depend for all which we hope to enjoy, both for time and for eternity. It is this sense which constitutes the sublime of character—which elevates man to the true dignity of his nature—which is the only permanent spring of every thing which is excellent and praise-worthy, and which imparts a kind and degree of happiness, which all the events of a fleeting, imperfect, and uncertain life can not affect. It is the *total want* of this sense, much more than any natural evils which are hanging over us, (and God only knows how many and how great they may be) which we have at this time, the greatest cause to fear. It is the *total want* of this sense, connected with the *wildest* opinions in morals, and particularly with a system of *liberal* morality as it is called, in which however there is neither *foundation, rule,* nor *motive* of human duty,

and in which we are encouraged to shew our affection to the *species* by a total disregard to *individuals*, and to all the relations and charities of social life—it is, I say, a *total want* of *this sense*, connected with this *cold-hearted, chilling, disorganizing philosophy*, which will do more, with respect to all subsisting institutions whether good or bad, if it be not timely prevented by the adoption of better principles, than I dare, or am willing to insinuate. The process has long been going on—it proceeds with accelerated rapidity. Let those who hate confusion and violence, and every evil work, who wish for PEACE internal and external, order, virtue, and happiness, be upon their guard. Let them strive indeed to *reform*—but let them not cut down with too ferocious and indiscriminate a hand. Let them strive to mend the *outward* state of the world by correcting the *hearts* and *principles* of all with whom they are connected; and by making them

wise,

wise, benevolent, humble, pious, and religious. It is the *obstinate retaining* of *abuses* which is the cause of *violence* in the *civil* world, and the *general prevalence of superstition,* which is the prime cause of *infidelity* and a *disregard* to *God* in *religion.* That nice discrimination which is able to separate what is genuine from what is spurious, is not the character of common minds, and is least to be expected in those who have shaken off all the principles, habits and ways of thinking and acting which they had imbibed in early life; and especially if they have been soured by disappointment in the schemes which they had formed of rising in the world; which is the case with many of those who fly for refuge—a miserable refuge indeed! to scepticism or infidelity. As fire operates differently, on different subjects, so adversity produces different effects, on different minds. Some it melts and softens, but others it hardens and renders more insensible. Perhaps there

are no Atheists in this country, and not many unbelievers with respect to Christianity, who have not met with crosses and disappointments in life, which have given an unnatural asperity to the temper. Some there are, who, discovering absurdities in the system, which was taught them in their youth, attach themselves, for a time, to those who have embraced Christianity in its simplest, its purest form. But the attachment of converts, whose change of party arises rather from dislike to their former opinions, than from a mature approbation of those they have lately adopted, often resembles that of new and sudden friends, which however ardent it may be at first, is seldom the most steady and constant. They call, and stay with us for a short period, like passengers at an inn; but being of an unsteady and a rambling disposition, they will quickly forsake us. Eager, perhaps, at first in the pursuit of truth, they follow her with too much

much impetuosity and violence; and on their progress, having acquired an increased velocity, they leave her at an immense distance behind them. It should seem, that, having in the course of their enquiries, been led, time after time, to discard tenets they once held to be sacred, they have by degrees, from the power of habit, formed in their minds a close association between a regard for truth, and the rejection of every proposition they formerly believed to be true. This perhaps is the least criminal cause of atheism. But even this is marked by rashness and a want of judgment; and as to those who stand forward as propagators of atheistical doctrines, conceit and pride of intellect will not seldom be found predominant features in their character. Humility is intimately connected with piety. Where this prime virtue of Christianity is to be found, atheism both speculative and practical is necessarily excluded. It requires very

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little ability to discover that a great part of what has been *called religion*, has no foundation, but in the weakness or wickedness of mankind. But it requires some comprehension of mind to distinguish between *superstition* and *religion*, and to discover, that although the *former* is irrational and absurd, and the source of some of the greatest evils in life, the *latter* is founded on the surest principles of reason, and is the greatest friend to human happiness. *Practical* atheism, or a total disregard to God, although his existence and perfections are acknowledged, has its seat more in the *heart* than in the *head*. It argues in general, and particularly in those who have been educated with just sentiments of the divine benevolence, a total want of all the finer feelings, of which the human heart is susceptible—a depraved taste, a low, coarse, and vulgar mind, an insensibility to the beauties of nature, and even the charms of the sublimer species of

poetry,

poetry, and often a character, the distinguishing traits of which, are selfishness and sensuality. Would a MILTON, would a THOMSON, would an AKENSIDE have composed those works which will render their names immortal, if they had been Atheists? Is a person who is a stranger to the feelings of devotion, capable of the glow of affection, and the ardour and disinterestedness of friendship? "Oh my soul, come not thou into their secret, unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!" While there is one religious character existing—one human being, whose heart, in unison with nature, vibrates to the praise of nature's God, may he be selected as the object of my particular confidence!

This unfeeling, — this irrational spirit, which I have been describing, I fear, my friends, will prevail. The seeds of it are sown, and continue to be sown with an unsparing hand; and where there is *ignorance*,

prejudice, or *vice*, particularly where there is *conceit*, there is a soil favourable to their growth. This unfeeling—this irrational spirit, I say, I fear will prevail. What effects it will produce during its prevalence, it is not difficult to conjecture. But it cannot be of long continuance. When it has performed its work of violence, it will assume its proper, hideous form, and like the infernal fury described by the poet, return to the regions from which it was commissioned.(a)

Religion is so congenial to the human mind; it is so friendly to the best interests of man, that it must, it will continue to bless mankind by its chearing influence, and in time, we have reason to hope, take up its residence in every human breast. Oh! let us cherish it as our best friend, through all the

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(a) Cocytique petit sedem, supera ardua linquens.

VIRGIL.

the intricate labyrinths of life, as the only sure foundation of a truly great, consistent, and honourable character; as the spring of our highest present pleasures, and most exalted future expectations. We seem, at present, much more afraid of *superstition*, of which we are in no danger, than of *infidelity*, of which there is the greatest danger. Superstition is, indeed, a very bad thing; but it is the *excess*, or the wrong direction, of *those passions*, which, if we are not much upon our guard, we are likely not to possess in *any degree*. From *superstition*, my friends, *we* have nothing to fear—from *infidelity*, we have *every thing* to fear. Let us then, make use of all the means in our power of strengthening the religious principle in our minds;—at this time, let us be particularly careful to practise all the *instrumental* duties of religion; the neglect of which, and a turn for cavilling about them, have been productive of the most serious consequences. Let us, if we wish for the *end*,

be diligent in the use of the *means*. Whatever has a tendency to make us *wiser* and *better*, is as obligatory as if it were written with a sun-beam, or commanded by a voice from heaven. Let us, in an especial manner, observe the day appointed for the public worship of Almighty God, and religious instruction. I scruple not to call it the *christian sabbath*. For notwithstanding the insinuations of many, both friends and enemies to revelation, who appear to unite in opinion on this subject, I know not where we have an account of the *total abolition* of the longest and most minute of all the commandments. The particular *day of the week*, can be of no importance. The particular *proportion of time* is quite another question. *This* appears to me to be still required for religious purposes, and particularly as the principal reason for enjoining it, namely, to preserve the belief of the creation and government of the world by Almighty God, applies as strongly to the present, as to any preceding

period. Let us then keep the Lord's day, or the Christian sabbath, which, whether it be a divine institution or not, (in the most important sense of the word, all the means of virtue are of divine appointment) certainly is not too great a portion of time to be devoted to our *moral* and *religious improvement*. Let us be constant in prayer to God in private, in our families, and in the church: for whatever an infidel may do, a christian who regulates his conduct by the precepts and example of Christ, cannot neglect this duty. Our Lord, foreseeing the necessity of it, has enforced no duty more frequently, and more strongly. Let us remember that it is a *law* of the *moral* world, as much as *gravity* is of the *natural*, that prayer is the means of holiness; and the unchangeableness of God, requires that we do not expect the *end*, *without the means*. Whatever may be the practice of others—with whatever indifference, or contempt, religious acts may be regarded by the world around us—let us, my christian

brethren, consider, as *a duty of indispensible obligation, every act* which has a natural tendency to refine and elevate our minds, to soften and meliorate our hearts, to make us satisfied with ourselves, and with all around us, to make us humble with respect to our own attainments, kind and candid to others, peaceable, gentle, affectionate, and forgiving; in a word, *pious* to God, and *benevolent* to man.

APPEN-

APPENDIX.

La plûpart de ceux qui ont écrit sur l' antiquité religieuse, ne nous ont donné que des notions, ou fausses, ou incomplètes. Ils avoient, avant d' écrire, une opinion faite ; et ils n' ont travaillé que pour rassembler des preuves propres à lui donner quelque vraisemblance. Alors leurs études, leurs efforts n' ont servi qu' à les égarer, en ne leur montrant que ce qu' ils vouloient voir. Ils avoient déjà un systême, et ils ont étudié l' antiquité, afin de trouver de quoi l' établir.

DUPUIS.

The preceding discourse, being intended as a preservative, to young persons in particular, against atheistical principles, and an irreligious

irreligious conduct, it may be proper to subjoin to it, a few very general and miscellaneous remarks upon a work, which has excited a considerable degree of attention on the continent, and which has frequently been spoken of in this country, as a work of great erudition,—*Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle:* Par Dupuis, Citoyen François.

The author of this, certainly *elaborate* composition, as it employed the attention of sixteen years, and consists of seven very large volumes, most of which being divided into two parts, make in reality, twelve volumes in octavo, professes to be only the Historian of religious opinions, and not to have entered into the examination of the question, respecting the existence of a Deity, or to have given his own opinion on the subject. He, nevertheless, when *revealed* religion is concerned, expresses himself in the most dogmatical

dogmatical manner possible, and treats those who assert their belief in it, with the utmoſt contempt.

The system which, with so much labour he has endeavoured to establish is, that Nature is God—that the religious worship of all nations is founded upon this principle—and that the various religious ceremonies, which have been practised in different parts of the world, have been only allegorical representations of physical appearances. He asserts that in the ritual observances of all religions, a *bull* or a *ram* has been introduced as an object of particular veneration, because Taurus and Aries are the two signs of the Zodiack, which, since the existence of historical records, the sun has entered, at the time of the vernal equinox. He denies that there is sufficient evidence to authorize the belief that Jesus Christ ever existed; and asserts that he is the same with

Hercules, Apollo, Bacchus, Osiris, Adonis, Mithra, and others who have been the objects of worship in different parts of the world, not indeed as deified men agreeably to the commonly received opinion, for *their* personal existence is also denied, but only as emblems of the sun, or as, what he calls the *God-Sun* himself: and the various incidents which are recorded by ancient poets and historians in the lives of these real or supposed benefactors of mankind, he endeavours to shew are only the phænomena of nature allegorically represented. M. Volney, in a work which has been translated into English under the title of *The Ruins, or a survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, has given us the same system. To which of these gentlemen the world is indebted for the discovery, it does not appear. M. Volney, in a note mentions a memoir of M. Dupuis on the origin of the constellations written some years ago, and now inserted in the sixth volume of the

octavo

octavo edition of his work. In this memoir the only circumstances particularly worthy of notice, are the assertions which he has ventured to make—*that the world is eternal, and that the present astronomical system has continued for the space of seventeen thousand years.*

It has been too much the practice of writers on theological subjects, both believers and unbelievers, to use words without affixing to them any clear and determinate ideas. Into this fault, M. Dupuis appears to have fallen, in a greater degree than any writer I ever met with. In the application of the term *God* to the universe, to nature, to the world, to the sun, and to the planets; and in the use of the terms *cause* and *effect*—*active* cause, *passive* cause, and the like, he has contributed to introduce such an intellectual chaos, as can only be reduced to order by just distinctions, and accurate definitions.

Whatever merit his work may possess, (of which different opinions will be formed, excepting that it is a work of great labour) certain it is, that it is so far from invalidating any of the arguments which have been advanced in the preceding discourse, or which are brought forward by writers on natural religion, to demonstrate the existence of God, that, *it does not come near them.* Even if he had *proved* that the *origin* of all worships was the worship of nature, it would by no means follow, that there was no *Author* of nature, or that this worship, with respect both to the object and the mode of it, contrary to that gradual progress which appears to be a law of the intellectual world, was perfect. But Dr. Leland, in his *Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation*, has shewn, that the firſt religion of mankind, was *not* idolatry, but the worship of *the one true God*, derived probably from Revelation, and that the notion of *one supreme God*, was never entirely extinguished in the pagan world.

What M. Dupuis means by *Religion universelle*, is an enquiry of considerable importance. It is particularly deserving our attention, that the religion of which he invariably speaks, has no reference to a deity distinct from the objects of nature, no reference to morals, and no reference to a future state. Surely it is not necessary to adduce many authorities from ancient writers, to prove that this has *not* been the universal religion. Plato, who lived four hundred years before Christ, in his dialogue called Philebus, introduces Socrates as asking in the words which I have selected for the motto of my title page, "*Whether*, O Protarchus, "*shall we say that this Universe, as it is called,* "*is under the direction of a power which acts* "*without reason or design, and just as it may* "*happen? or, on the contrary, as our fore-* "*fathers have asserted, that* MIND, *and a* "*certain wonderful* WISDOM, *acting with* "*regularity and order, governs all things?*"

What?

What? was the worship of the Jews, the worship of a bull, or of any of the visible objects of nature? On the contrary, was not this worship, by their law, punished with death? Exod. xxxii. 19—28. Deut. xvii. 2—7.

Whether M. Dupuis may have given a true account of the origin and nature of *idolatrous* worship, which is the object to which his labours are *really* directed, is a point which I leave to be settled between him and those who plead for the worship of departed heroes. This has frequently been the subject of discussion. The believer in God, however, is not, as such, particularly interested in it. But there is one thing which both M. Dupuis and M. Volney have endeavoured to keep out of sight, which must be brought forward, namely, *the actual belief of the existence of an intelligent author of nature, and the worship of him, and of him alone.*

alone. This must either be denied, or accounted for. The *positive denial* of it, being rather too bold a proceeding, it seems to have been the design of such works as that now under consideration, either to lead to a denial by implication, or to divert the attention from the subject. Each of these, however, is an artifice which a mind smitten with the love of truth, ought not to submit to. If the belief of one God, the author of nature, has ever prevailed, or does in any instances now prevail, there must have been some *cause* for it—to some minds there must have appeared grounds for the admission of it. These are either satisfactory or inconclusive. As the subject is of infinitely the greatest importance of any which can employ the attention of the human mind, the labour of M. Dupuis would have been much more usefully bestowed in its investigation, than in enquiries concerning the origin of the names and the figures of the constellations.

The

The belief of a CREATOR of the world, in opposition to the doctrine of the God-world, the God-sun, the God-nature, and the like, has prevailed, and does now prevail. By creation, I mean not to refer to the *matter* of which the world was composed, but to the *composition*. The belief, I say, of a CREATOR of the world, and, what has not been sufficiently attended to, by writers on the side of infidelity, of innumerable worlds, and systems of worlds, has prevailed, and does now prevail. This belief must have arisen either from the deductions of reason, or from revelation, or from both. If the *reasons* upon which it is built, be weak and inconclusive, let M. Dupuis or M. Volney shew that they are so. *They have not yet done it: They have not even entered on the subject.* Revelation positively asserts the same truth. Revelation, they say, is an impossibility; and to this conclusion, the arguments of most of the enemies of Christi-

anity,

anity, although they probably do not see the extent of them, certainly tend. On one supposition, and on one supposition only, is revelation impossible.—It is, that Atheism has been demonstrated. The advocates for the existence of a Deity, and the advocates for divine revelation, enter upon the proof of both these points, and only wish fairly to meet their opponents on the subject: the most able advocates for the contrary hypotheses, decline all discussion, though invited to it for the sake of truth; and conceal their want of argument, under the pretext, that they are only the Historians of the opinions of others.(a)

There is one fundamental error which runs through the whole performance of M. Dupuis. He confounds *Popery* with Christianity. As the

(a) See Dr. Priestley's correspondence with Mr. Gibbon.

religion which he speaks of is a religion without the belief of a former of the world, without any reference to morals, and without the doctrine of a future state, so the Christianity which he supposes to be a branch of the worship of the Sun, consists chiefly, if not altogether, of doctrines and of ceremonies, for which there is no foundation in the new testament. When it is observed (and my love of truth, and affection for pure and genuine Christianity oblige me to make the observation) that the gospel knows nothing of the festivals of Christmas or Easter—that there is no proof that Jesus Christ was born on the twenty-fifth of December, but on the contrary, the best supported opinion is that he was born at another time of the year—that whether the second and third chapters of Genesis are to be understood literally, or allegorically, or only in the light of a Jewish tradition, is a matter quite foreign to the present subject—that Jesus Christ positively forbids the worship of himself; and

that

that *his Father* and *our Father*, *his God* and *our God*, *that Being* who *made the world* and all things in it, is the *exclusive object* of the worship of Christians—When it is further observed with respect to the Christianity of M. Dupuis, that his doctrines of a trinity and transubstantiation—his monastic institutions, his mysteries and initiations, so largely insisted upon in his remarks on the Apocalypse, have no place in the new testament, but are contrary, both to its letter and spirit: when it is moreover observed, that although Christianity admits of *teachers* and *instructors*, it says nothing about *priests* with exclusive privileges, but declares *every christian* to be a priest—*All his objections fall to the ground.* In a word, he has attempted to account for what is to be accounted for, on such principles as he has advanced; he has left untouched what solicit only the keenest examination,—the *real doctrines* and *evidences* of the gospel. If his work had been entitled a history of *super-*

stition, as it respects natural religion, and a history of the *corruptions* of Christianity, it might have been read (with a few omissions, which would not affect the main argument,) as a useful addition to what Dr. Priestley has written on this subject. He probably thought by his violent exertions, that he had destroyed Christianity for ever;—whereas totally mistaking his object, he has not inflicted upon it the slightest wound.

Extraordinary as the conduct of M. Dupuis may at first view appear, on a closer inspection it will be found to be easily resolvable into that commanding law of human nature, the law of association of ideas. Accustomed from the earliest period of life to consider *Superstition* as *Religion*, and *Popery* as *Christianity*, it is not to be wondered at, that the association in his mind should have become indissoluble, and that disgusted with whatever had appeared to him under the form of religion

religion, he should have rejected it altogether.

The period of implicit *reception*, in France, appears to be over; the period of implicit *rejection*, as might naturally be expected, has succeeded; the period of *discrimination* is yet future. When this intellectual process shall be completed, we may reasonably expect that the result of the whole, will be a soil favourable for the reception of the seeds of truth. Perhaps the same principle, in an inferior degree, and the inconsistent conduct of many believers in God, and professors of Christianity, with their belief and profession, will account for the rejection, not only of Christianity, but also of Theism, by some in this country, who in other circumstances would have admitted both. The conduct of such, however, though it may merit forgiveness, has no claim to commendation. The investigation of the subject is not attended with

with any peculiar difficulties; and persons of truly enlarged and unprejudiced minds, may soon know both what Christianity is, and by what evidence it is supported. Mr. Wakefield, in his notes on Matthew, says that "infidel objectors to Christianity might often convince themselves of its truth, with half the labour which they perversely take to disparage and subvert it." If the time which M. Dupuis has spent in investigating the origin of the figures on an artificial celestial globe, and in endeavouring to reconcile the Apocalypse with his system of the worship of the Sun, had been employed in reading this author's *translation of the new Testament*, his *notes on Matthew's Gospel*, his *enquiry into the opinions of the Christian writers of the three first centuries*, and his *remarks on the internal evidences of the Christian Religion*, he could not have written as he has done, and have thought that he was attacking Christianity. The Discourses of Dr. Foster, *on the principal branches of natural Religion*

and

and social Virtue, are calculated to prepare the mind for a clear comprehension of these subjects; and I cannot help expressing a wish that no person would hereafter conceive himself qualified to write against revealed Religion, who has not studied, not only the smaller works of Dr. Paley and Bishop Watson, but the larger works of Doctors Lardner and Priestley. Until this is done, a firm Theist, and a zealous Christian, who has made himself master of the subject, can at any time, place the arguments in favour of infidelity, in a clearer point of view than they are placed by the generality of infidels themselves.

I know that one of the difficulties of unbelievers is grounded on the *Wars* which have subsisted in what is called the Christian world, since the time when (according to the representation of Dr. Jortin) the Church went over to the State, and not the State to the Church.

Wars

Wars have too often, alas, subsisted in *other* parts of the world, and *Reasons* as they have been called, have been urged in their defence. But who ever concluded from this circumstance, that there was no such faculty as Reason? In other cases there is no great difficulty in distinguishing the *real* from the *ostensible* motives of mankind. Had Alexander or Julius Cæsar lived since the time of Constantine, it is not improbable that the ostensible cause of their wars would have been the propagation of the Christian Faith.

The extensive prevalence of the Mahometan superstition, is often mentioned as a fact, destructive of the credit of Christianity, as a divine revelation. But the things themselves, and all the circumstances attending them, are totally dissimilar; and what will account for the one will not account for the other. Mahometanism accommodated itself to the opinions, the prejudices, and even the vices of mankind;

mankind; it did not pretend to be founded on the evidence of miracles, and it was propagated by the sword. Christianity was in all respects the reverse. And yet perhaps a greater degree of faith in historical evidence is not required to constitute a person a Christian, than is universally exercised with respect to the Arabian Impostor. I believe the historical account which is given of Mahomet, and the propagation of his religion, but I am not a Mahometan. I believe the historical account which is given of Jesus Christ, and the propagation of his Religion, and I am necessarily a Christian.

Unbelievers further object, that Christians are not agreed among themselves concerning the doctrines of Christianity, and they say that they are not therefore informed what it is which they are called upon to believe. Would they argue in this manner on any other subject? Because mankind differ in

their opinions concerning matters of taste, is there no rule of judgment, no standard of taste, to which the mind can refer? Because they differ on points of general jurisprudence, and in the interpretation of particular laws, are there no principles of equity, and is there neither common nor statute law existing? But after all, Christians *do agree* in all essential points, and in vindicating Christianity against the objections of unbelievers, these and these only are the points which generally are, and which always ought to be insisted upon. Bishop Watson and Dr. Paley, notwithstanding the many articles to which their belief as Churchmen extends, yet in their judicious defences of Christianity, take the same ground with myself. They would acknowledge a man to be a Christian, who believes the divine mission of Jesus Christ, confirmed by miracles, and by his own resurrection from the dead. This is the Christianity which the apostles preached,

and

and all who received it were admitted into *their* communion. The articles of *belief* which constitute a Christian, though of infinite importance, are not very numerous; but the practical influence of these doctrines extends to every thought of the heart, and to every action of the life. The Christian religion peremptorily forbids every vice, and absolutely commands every virtue. The attention of mankind has hitherto been too much directed to doctrines, and too little to practice. The former are useful only as subservient to the latter. When Religion in speculation is considered as the acknowledgement of a Being of every possible perfection, the framer, preserver, and governor of the universe—whose spring of action is benevolence, and the end of whose government, general happiness, and who stands in the relation of a common Father to the whole human race: when religious worship is considered as the natural expression of those affections

which are due to such a Being, consisting of love, gratitude, veneration, submission, and brotherly affection to all his creatures; and when this expression, and even these affections are considered as of no avail without the constant practice of all the moral virtues to which they sustain the relation of means to an end: when Christianity is considered as enforcing all these by the sanction of divine authority, and the positive promise of a future state of endless happiness, whereof God has given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised Jesus Christ from the dead;—when, I say, Revelation is *thus* represented, there must be something singular in the state of that person's mind who will not attend to any arguments which can be produced in its defence. This *is* Christianity, in whatever light it may have been considered. It moreover admits, and frequently employs every other motive to virtue, which reason can suggest. It is one of its express commands,

"what-

" whatsoever things are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report; if there be any thing praise-worthy, if there be any thing virtuous, think on these things." " Godliness," (which in the language of the new testament, means the practice of every virtue, from a principle of love to God,) we are told, " is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come."

If the barriers of Religion be once broken down, an inundation of vices will be the immediate consequence: indeed, there is reason to apprehend that men will abstain only from those vices, to which they want the inclination. And a most tremendous consideration this is. The effects of Atheism we have not yet in any great degree experienced, as the mental habits of those who hold it in speculation, were in general formed before they had adopted their present principles,

ples, and by the imperceptible influence of that religion which they now traduce. A man of benevolence of heart cannot help being zealous on this subject, because he is fully convinced that all the natural evil which prevails in the world, in consequence of the wickedness of mankind, Christianity is calculated to remove; and to remove it, without any violence, without any previous evil.

Considering the limited extent of the human faculties, in this infancy of our existence, it is not to be wondered at, that on the subjects of natural and revealed religion, as well as on other subjects, there ſhonld be difficulties, the solution of which we must not expect at present: but infidelity is so far from removing these difficulties, that it leaves them just where it found them, and introduces to them a chaos of absurdities, mysteries, and incomprehensibilities. Eternity and Infinity are subjects which the human mind cannot grasp;

grasp; but the difficulty lies not in conceiving *of God* as eternal or infinite, but in conceiving of eternity and infinity in the *abstract*: and to *whatever subject* M. Dupuis may apply these characters, whether to mankind, to the world, to the sun, or to nature, he will find the difficulty to remain the same. With the *substance* or *essence* of God we have nothing to do—it is only with the *character* of God that we are concerned. And as all perfection may be resolved into natural, intellectual, and moral, that is into *power*, *wisdom*, and *goodness*, our idea of God, which has been supposed to be so confused and overwhelming, is that of a Being possessing these, with all the perfections which result from them, in the highest possible degree. Allow only the existence of this Being, our creation by him, and his superintending Providence, and there is but little difficulty in establishing the truth of divine revelation. I know not upon what

principles,

principles Christianity can be rejected, and any historical fact be admitted. Even the sums of all the historical testimonies added up together, which M. Dupuis (who has no objection to historical testimony in support of *some causes*) has collected in all the volumes of his work, is trifling in comparison of that which is brought to prove, not only the personal existence, but even the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With much more reason on my side, might I assert that the landing of Julius Cæsar in Britain, had no existence as an historical fact, but is only an allegory, invented to remind us of the Sun's passing through the signs Aquarius and Pisces to enter the vernal equinox, than he has for his assertion, that Christianity had no existence as an historical fact, but is only a modification of the worship of the sun.

Unbelievers are apt to consider only one side of the subject, and not to attend to the

the alternative. But if Christianity be not a divine revelation, it is an *imposture*. Suppose it for a moment to have been an imposture; nothing, I confess, could appear clearer to my mind, than that the persons who must have been the Agents in this presumed imposture, never *would* have been guilty of it; and if they had attempted it, to say nothing of the impossibility of their success, that they *could* no more haye invented the whole, and have written the books which contain the account, than *they could have made a world.* To adopt the glowing language of Dr. White, "The Evangelists have exhibited a character far more lovely in itself, and far more venerable than fiction has ever painted; and in their mode of exhibiting it, they surpass the fidelity, the distinctness, and precision, which two of the most celebrated writers have been able to preserve, when exerting the whole powers of their genius, and actuated by the fondest attachment, they

were endeavouring to do justice to the noblest pattern of real virtue, of which antiquity can boast. On the history of Socrates have been employed, the exquisite taste of Xenophon, and the sublime genius of Plato."

The religion of Jesus Christ has existed for many centuries, and continues to exist. It is asserted to be a divine revelation, and the books which contain an account of it are said to be true and worthy to be believed. For all this, a sufficient *efficient* cause is adduced, namely *God himself*, and a sufficient *final* cause, namely to promote the present and future happiness of mankind; and to these causes efficient and final, we have all that positive evidence, confirmed by presumptive and collateral evidence, by which the credibility of ancient facts is established. The contrary of this is asserted, namely, that the whole is an imposture, and that the books which contain an account of it, are an

imposition

imposition on the world. Will any one assign a sufficient efficient, and a sufficient final cause for the imposture, and shew that his hypothesis is confirmed by historical evidence? This certainly has not yet been done, although it appears necessary, to render any scheme of infidelity credible.

Again, they who assert that Christianity is a divine revelation, shew in the first place, that a divine revelation is *possible*; in the second place, from the perfections of God, and the circumstances of mankind, that it is *probable*, and thirdly, from historical evidence, that it *has actually* taken place. They who assert that Christianity is an imposture, and that the books which contain an account of it are forgeries, are required to prove the *first* step of this process, for the *possibility* of their assertion is positively disputed.

Once more, a thousand facts might be adduced, each of which stands as an effect without a cause, if the truth of the gospel history be denied. To take into consideration only one, the discourse of Paul at Athens, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. That a Jew, allowing him to have been a man of education among the Jews, should have been able in a short speech, to give the wisest men in the world more instruction respecting the perfections, government, and worship of the one true God, the nature, circumstances, and duties of mankind, and the doctrine and evidences of a future state, than is to be found in the writings of all their philosophers put together, is itself a fact, which fixes upon Scepticism the charge of credulity, and upon Infidelity, the imputation of implicit and groundless belief. On the whole, I cannot but conclude, that a fair exhibition of the credulity of Infidelity, or what those will believe

believe, who cannot bring themselves on any evidence whatever, to believe revealed religion, would be the most curious specimen which could be given, of the inconsistency of the human mind. M. Dupuis has furnished us with ample materials for the undertaking.

The observations which have been made on the account which this writer has given of the *doctrines* of Christianity, are equally applicable to the account which he has given of its *morality*. He every where considers the practices of the Romish Church as Christian duties of indispensible obligation. In the midst of a violent invective against monastic institutions, he expresses himself in these words—" Qu' on ne dise pas que ce soit là l' abus de la religion, et qu' on ne doive pas décrier un établissement, parce que des abus s' y sont glissés. Ce n' est point un abus dans les principes de la religion Chrétienne,

tienne, c' est au contraire la perfection du Christianisme, et le prêtre nous enseigne, que chacun de nous doit viser à la perfection." And again—" Tels sont les dogmes de cette Religion meurtrière, qu' on vante si fort, et dont on dit que le peuple a besoin." T. iv. p. 491. 493.

" *Let it not be said that this is an abuse of religion, and that we should not argue against an institution, because some abuses have insinuated themselves into it. This is not an abuse in the principles of the Christian religion, on the contrary, it is the perfection of Christianity, and we are instructed by the priest, that every one of us ought to aim at perfection. Such are the tenets of that murderous religion, which is so much boasted of, and of which it is said that mankind have need.*"

Great indeed is the power of prejudice in precluding conviction, even where it will not absolutely

absolutely prevent examination. But in all cases of this kind, there are limits to its power. There is a moral, as well as a natural impossibility; and there are many cases in which the beams of truth will break through the thickest cloud of prejudice. But the most dangerous, as well as the most common operation of this principle, is when it excludes all enquiry; when it so completely closes the eye of the mind, that not a single ray of truth can reach it. This must have been the case in the present instance. Prejudice will not account for the ignorance which M. Dupuis discovers respecting the morals of Christianity, on the supposition that he has ever read the new testament. It will, however, account for another fact, which affords a sufficient solution of the difficulty, namely that he has *not* read it. Detached passages, indeed, the meaning of which, from his previous state of mind, he would naturally mistake, and the book of the Revelation of

St.

St. John, on which he has written remarks without understanding any thing of its contents, he has doubtless perused; but his ignorance of the *morals* of Christianity is so profound, that it does not appear to me a possible supposition, that he should have read the practical parts, of either the gospels, or the epistles. I do not accuse him of *wilful* misrepresentation, but I do accuse him of the *grossest* misrepresentation which can proceed from ignorance and prejudice. I do not say that he *did* know better, but I hesitate not to say, that before he had expressed himself so positively on the morality of the new testament, he *ought* to have known better.

Yes! as Christians, we are commanded to aim at perfection. Perfection is, indeed, the character of every part of the Christian religion. It informs us that there is a *perfect Being* at the head of the universe; a Being,

by

by whose power all things were framed, and by whose superintending providence, all things are governed and directed. It informs us, that we are designed by our benevolent Creator, for perfect, for eternal happiness; and it further informs us, that *moral* perfection is not only the condition of obtaining, but the very temper of mind which will qualify us for enjoying this happiness. We are therefore exhorted "to be perfect," in our measure and degree, "even as our Father in heaven is" absolutely "perfect."

The temper of mind which we are required to cultivate in consequence of that high standard of moral excellence which christianity holds out to us, and which indeed naturally follows, from keeping this standard constantly in view, as the measure not only of our outward conduct, but even of our words and thoughts, is the christian virtue of *humility*. Christian humility, however, is

not that spirit and temper which M. Dupuis has described under this appellation, but a quality as opposite to it as light is to darkneſs. To prevent all mistakes on the subject, the apostle has given us an exact definition of it—" I say to every one that is among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly," that is, truly.

The human mind formed to contemplate perfection ;—by a law of its constitution always deriving satisfaction from seeing things in a progress towards it,—and capable of expanding itself, according to the magnitude of the object which employs its attention ; is, by the views which Christianity exhibits, elevated to its true dignity, and proceeds in an ascending series, according to the animating representation of Dr Hartley, from imperfect to perfect, from particular to general, from finite to infinite, and from the creature

creature to the creator. On the contrary, the low and unphilosophical ideas, which Infidelity gives of the system of the universe, the low ideas which it gives of oursèlves, and of every thing around us, have a tendency to introduce that retrograde motion of mind (if I may so express myself,) which is as fatal to genius, sensibility, and every thing which deserves the name of science, as it is to virtue and to happiness; and which ultimately tends to that disconsolate and melancholy state, which the poet has described, as the condition of man, during only the first period of his existence,

"His time a moment, and a point his space."

POPE.

That we may be on our guard against a too common and practical error,—that of confounding opinions with the persons who hold them, I beg leave to quote a passage from the preface to the fifth volume of the

work of M. Dupuis, which (with the interesting dedication to his wife,) leads one to hope, that his quarrel with religion, like many quarrels which take place in the world, was owing chiefly to misconception; and that there were moments in his life, when if he had paid a proper degree of attention to the subject, his mind would have been open to conviction.

" J' avoue néanmoins que s' il est une Religion, qui semble devoir échapper à l' analyse que nous avons entreprise de faire des Cultes, par le moyen de l' astronomie et de la physique, et ne pouvoir être confondue avec les autres, dont elle a dans tous les temps affecté de se séparer, c' est sans doute la Religion des Chrétiens."

" *I confess, however, that if there be a religion which is not susceptible of the analysis which we have undertaken to give of the different*

ferent forms of worship which have subsisted in the world, by means of astronomy and physics, and which cannot be confounded with others, from which it has ever affected to separate itself, it is, without doubt, the Religion of Christians.

The following passages, selected from the work of M. Dupuis, which I am informed, is likewise published in three volumes quarto, with a volume of plates, which is common to both editions, will, I presume, afford considerable entertainment to my readers, and enable them to judge of the fidelity with which I have represented the opinions of this elaborate writer, and of the accuracy of the remarks which I have submitted to their consideration.

Je ne suis que l' historien des opinions des autres, et je ne donne point la mienne. Préf. p. 12.

Je ne parlerai point des Religions révélées, parce qu'il n'en existe point, et qu'il n'en peut exister. Toutes

sont filles de la curiosité, de l'ignorance, de l'intérêt, et de l'imposture. Préf. p. 13.

La Nature entière et seule s'est présentée tout-a-coup pour remplir cette grande idée de cause universelle ou de Dieu. Préf. p. 18.

L'Univers-Dieu ou cause et regardé comme tel, voilà mon premier chapitre. Préf. p. 18.

Les Dieux étant la Nature, elle-même, l'histoire des Dieux est donc celle de la Nature; et comme elle n'a point d'autres aventures, que ses phénomènes, les aventures des Dieux seront donc les phénomènes de la Nature mis en allégories. Préf. p. 19-20.

On voit donc ici l'origine du culte rendu au soleil et à la lune; il est fondé sur la persuasion où étoient les peuples, que ces astres exercent un empire souverain dans la Nature, et qu'ils y tiennent le rang de premières causes. t. 1. p. 90.

Le culte ne peut jamais être qu'une invention moderne dans l'éternité.

Nous croyons que le peuple Athée, s'il en existe un, est le plus ancien, ou celui au moins qui a eu la plus

petite communication avec les nations dégradées par les cultes. t. 1. p. 122.

Les enfans que la Nature portoit dans son sein presque par-tout lui ont laissé son titre de mère ; quelques bâtards seuls ont parlés d'un père inconnu. Excepté ce petit nombre d'ingrats et de rêveurs, le reste de l'Univers a pensé comme le plus grand des Naturalistes, qu'hors la Nature il ne falloit rien chercher ; qu'elle étoit en même-temps la cause et l'effet, l'ouvrier et l'ouvrage. t. 1. p. 125.

Ces peuples habitoient le mont Liban, et furent quelquefois maîtres de l'Egypte, d'où ils purent emprunter le culte du chien, comme les Juifs en avoient empruntés celui du boeuf Apis, dont les veaux d'or n'étoient qu'une imitation. t. 1. p. 197.

On remarque une étonnante correspondance entre les caractères que Jacob dans sa prophétie donne à chacun de ses enfans, et les caractères des signes ou des planetes qui ont leur domicile dans ces signes, Le verseau, dont l'eau s'écoule dans les cieux vers le pôle austral, et le premier des quatre signes royaux en montant, sert d' enseigne à Ruben, premier fils de Jacob, que son père compare à l'eau qui s'écoule. Le lion est peint sur le pavillon de Juda, que Jacob a comparé à cet animal,

qui dans les cieux est le domicile du soleil, de cet astre lumineux dont tous les peuples ont fait leur Dieu, sous les noms d'Adonis, de Mithra, de Christ, &c. Ephraïm, que Moïse assimile au bœuf a pour enseigne le taureau céleste. t. 1. p. 207.

— à la Nature et à ses agens, ou aux causes du monde, c'est-à-dire, aux parties du monde qui font la fonction de causes. t. 1. p. 259.

Ainsi nous avons vu que les Juifs dans les différentes couleurs qu'ils avoient données aux voiles du tabernacle, et à la tunique du souverain sacrificateur, avoient cherché également à imiter la teinte des élémens. Isidore conclut avec raison de tout cela, que les élémens et les astres, qu'on cherchoit à imiter, étoient honorés comme Dieux dans cette cérémonie. Il y voit une invention du Diable, et nous un monument savant de l'ancienne religion, ou plutôt de la religion universelle du monde, dont la Nature fut l'unique Divinité, sous quelque forme qu'elle ait été travestie. t. 1. p. 261.

La terre devoit paroître comme la matrice de la Nature et le réceptacle des formes ; comme la mère et la nourrice des êtres, que le ciel engendroit dans son sein. t. 1. p. 369.

La

La distinction de la cause première et suprême en deux parties, l'une active et l'autre passive ; l'Univers agent et patient, ou le Dieu monde hermaphrodite, est un des plus anciens dogmes de la philosophie, ou de la théologie naturelle, et un des plus répandus. t. 1. p. 371.

Cet éloge, que Pline fait de la divinité du soleil, doit nous avertir de sa prééminence sur tous les Dieux, que les anciens Mythologues et que tous les anciens poètes ont chantés, et rend vraisemblable l'opinion de ceux qui, comme Macrobe, ont rapporté au soleil la plûpart des divinités, qui occupoient la première place dans la religion des anciens peuples. Tels sont Osiris en Egypte, Adonis en Phénicie, Mithra en Perse, Atys en Lydie, Ammon en Lybie, Bacchus chez les Arabes, Apollon chez les Grecs, Bélus chez les Chaldéens, Hercule à Thèbes en Egypte, Christ chez les Chrétiens. t. 1. p. 440.

Les Egyptiens dans un certain jour de l'année, présentoient à l'adoration des peuples l'image du soleil, sous l'emblême d'un enfant naissant, qu'ils tiroient du fond de leur sanctuaire. Nous ferons voir dans la suite de cet ouvrage, que ce jeune enfant mystérieux est le Christ des Chrétiens, le même que le fameux Orus, ou l'Apollon Egyptien, fils de la vierge Isis. t. 1. p. 459.

Ces deux signes, taureau et agneau, ou bélier, ayant successivement passé à l'équinoxe de printemps, sont devenus l'emblême du *Soleil vainqueur* des ténèbres de l'hiver, et réparateur du désordre de la Nature, qui tous les ans étoit régénérée sous ces signes. t. 1. p. 466.

" Qui seroit jamais assez insensé pour avoir un Dieu qu'on boit et qu'on mange," dit Ciceron. Cet orateur philosophe n'avoit pas encore la mesure de la crédulité de l'homme. S'il eût vécu quelques siècles plus tard, il n'auroit pas tenu ce language; et il auroit vu des peuples s'entregorger pour maintenir ce dogme religeux d'un Dieu que l'on peut boire et manger. t. 1. p. 577.

Nous avons mis le lecteur en état de nous suivre partout où il s'agira d'expliquer les phénomènes du monde visible, c'est-à-dire, du seul et unique Dieu. t. 1. p. 724.

Ce qu'Osiris étoit chez les Egyptiens, Bacchus chez les Grecs, Adonis l'étoit chez les Phéniciens; et son culte étoit celui du Dieu-Soleil, seigneur du Ciel, adoré sous différens noms chez les différens peuples. Le nom d'Adonis, que lui donnoient les Phéniciens, est synonime de celui de monseigneur. Les Chrétiens, en parlant de Christ ou de leur Dieu-Soleil, l'appeloient le seigneur.

seigneur. Les Juifs, voisins de la Phénice, avoient aussi leur Adonis. t. 3. p. 471.

Quel est l'homme de génie qui, par humilité, peut se croire un sot, et qui s'efforcera, pour plus grande perfection, de se le persuader ; ou l'honnête homme qui, par humilité, concevra pour lui-même le mépris, qu'on doit avoir pour un fripon ? Le précepte est absurde, parce qu'il est impossible de porter aussi loin l'illusion. t. 4. p. 504.

Quels sont les héros de cette religion, les grands modèles qu'on nous met sous les yeux ? Pas un homme recommandable par des vertus véritablement sociales et patriotiques, par son devouement pour la chose publique, par des découvertes utiles, et par ces qualités privées, qui caractérisent un bon père, un bon époux, un bon fils, un bon frère, un bon ami, un bon citoyen ; ou si par hazard il a une de ces vertus, elles ne sont que l'accessoire de son éloge. Ce qu'on loue en lui, ce sont des austérités, des abstinences, des mortifications, des pratiques pieuses, on plutôt superstitieuses ; un grand zèle pour la propagation de sa folle doctrine, et un oubli de tout pour suivre sa chimère. t. 4. p. 512.

Eleusis fermoit ses portes à Néron ; les Chrétiens l'auroient reçu, s'il se fût déclaré pour eux. Quelle affreuse Religion, que celle qui reçoit dans son sein les plus cruels tyrans, qui en fait ses protecteurs, et qui absout de tous les crimes ! Quoi, Néron, s'il eût été Chrétien, auroit été un Saint ! Pourquoi non ? Constantin aussi coupable que lui, en est bien un. La raison et la nature n'auroient jamais absous Néron. La Religion Chrétienne l'eût absous, s'il se fût fait baptiser. Quelle horreur ! Il est des monstres, qu'il faut abandonner aux remords et à l'effroi des Furies. La Religion qui les calme enhardit aux forfaits. Une telle Religion doit donc être regardée comme une institution funeste, et une véritable monstruosité en politique, comme en morale. t. 4. p. 528.

Christ sera pour nous, ce qu'ont été Hercule, Osiris, Adonis, Bacchus. Il partagera en commun avec eux le Culte, que tous les Peuples de tous les Pays et de tous les siècles ont rendu à la nature universelle et à ses agens principaux ; et s'il semble prendre un corps mortel, comme les héros des anciens poëmes, ce ne sera que dans les fictions d'une légende. t. 5. p. 11.

L'exiſtence de Chriſt réparateur ne peut être admise, comme fait historique, qu'autant que la conversation du serpent avec la femme, et l'introduction du mal, qui

en fut la suite, sera un fait réel et historique. Si au contraire cette aventure prétendue n'est qu'une allégorie, la réparation de Christ et sa mission ne peut être une réalité. t. 5. q. 14.

Ainsi Mithra et Christ naissoient le même jour, et ce jour étoit celui de la naissance du Dieu Soleil. On disoit de Mithra, qu'il étoit le Soleil, et de Christ, qu'il étoit la lumière qui éclaire l'homme venant dans le monde.(a) t. 5. p. 131.

On voit Christ comme Bacchus, changer l'eau en vin, et comme lui, monter sur l'âne dans son triomphe. t. 5. p. 159.

C'est précisément à l'équinoxe de printemps, que le Christ triomphe; car il triomphe à Pâques et la Pâques des Chrétiens est fixée nécessairement à l'équinoxe. t. 5. p. 161.

Ce n'est pas sans raison, que les Payens, appeloient les Chrétiens les adorateurs du Soleil : d'autant plus, qu'ils se tournoient vers cet astre dans leurs prières, qu'ils s'assembloient le jour qui lui étoit consacré, et qu'ils fêtoient son passage et son retour à son empire,

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(a) This text is often quoted as a decisive proof of the identity of Christ with the Sun.

au moment où le Soleil repassoit vers les régions superieures. Mithra naissoit dans une grotte, comme Christ dans une étable. Ce sont les adorateurs de Mithra, qui sont supposés venir au berceau de Christ, et lui offrir les trois presens consacrés au Soleil. C'est l'Astrologie qui les y conduit. Ils voient, au moment de cette naissance, à l'Orient une étoile. En plaçant le globe à minuit, tel qu'il étoit le 25 décembre à cette époque prétendue, si nous regardons aussi à l'Orient, qu'y voyons-nous ? la Constellation de la Vierge céleste, qui préside à la naissance du jour où nait le Soleil. t. 5. p. 415.

Les Anciens appeloient Seigneur le Soleil : les Chrétiens appellent son jour le jour du Seigneur. t. 5. p. 420.

Quoique nous n'écrivions pas ici pour des lecteurs, qui croyent à une révélation, mais uniquement pour ceux qui font usage de leur raison, la première et la seule lumière que la nature ait accordée à l'homme, nous répondrons, que la révélation ne peut être censée nécessaire, et qu'on ne peut en supposer l'existence, qu'autant que la génération d'une idée importante sur la Divinité seroit inexplicable à l'homme. Mais il s'en faut de beaucoup que nous en soyons r duits là. Nous avons vu naître la Trinité, ou le dogme de l'unité de Dieu, principe de vie et d'intelligence. Nous

l'avons vu prendre naissance dans le monde matériel et visible, et passer ensuite par abstraction dans le monde intellectuel et invisible. Nous l'avons vu se propager, se multiplier sous mille formes, donner naissance à une foule de combinaisons de la même abstraction, différentes dans différentes écoles; et par-tout nous avons reconnu la marche de l'homme, dont le génie subtil a enfanté une foule de Triades de tout espèce. Nous avons prouvé, que c'étoit là comme la manie de toutes les écoles, dans les siècles où s'est formé le Christianisme. t. 5. p. 401.

L'epoque de cette invention remonte bien au-delà du terme fixé par nos Chronologistes, pour la création du monde, à laquelle nous sommes bien éloignés de croire; car il nous semble éternel. t. 6. p. 508.

Dans un monde éternel on ne doit jamais être embarrassé par l'antiquité des époques. Dans l'univers Dieu, dans l'univers éternel, on ne compte point de date. t. 6. p. 515.

Ce sont ces reflexions, qui nous ont fait reculer seulement de quatorze à quinze mille ans, avant notre siècle, l'invention, non pas de l'Astronomie, mais celle des figures Hiéroglyphiques, tracées dans le Zodiaque, que les Grecs ont reçu des Egyptiens et des Chaldéens, et que nous avons encore anjourd'hui. t. 6. p. 516.

From this dark and joyless scene—the grave of every refined and elevated sentiment; of comfort and even of hope—let us rise to those views of the universe which genius, aided by true philosophy, and by RELIGION, the sublimest philosophy, presents to our contemplation.

Seiz'd in thought
On fancy's wild and roving wing I sail
From the green borders of the peopled earth,
And the pale moon her duteous fair attendant;
From solitary Mars; from the vast orb
Of Jupiter, whose huge gigantic bulk
Dances in ether like the lightest leaf;
To the dim verge, the suburbs of the system,
Where cheeerless Saturn 'midst his wat'ry moons,
Girt with a lucid zone, in gloomy pomp,
Sits like an exil'd monarch: fearless thence
I launch into the trackless deeps of space,
Where, burning round, *ten thousand suns* appear
Of elder beam; which ask no leave to shine
Of our terrestrial star, nor borrow light
From the proud regent of our scanty day;
Sons of the morning, first-born of creation

And only less than HIM who marks their track,
And guides their fiery wheels

Let me here
Content and grateful, wait th' appointed time
And ripen for the skies: the hour will come
When all these splendors bursting on my sight
Shall stand unveil'd, and to my ravish'd sense
Unlock the glories of the world unknown.

MRS. BARBAULD

END.

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